

DIS2E DESIGN FOR SOCIAL INOVATION: EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: *In intensive workshop setting, 1st year students of theatre and design courses, develop a joint project with a local community in a specific territory.*

Five houses, five families, five objects and five groups, was the motto to build with the community a show that gives voice to the material and immaterial memories of a place, Couros, which is a strategic area in the historic center of Guimarães.

More than the introduction to participatory design methodologies, the teaching and learning model of design for social innovation, aims to create skills to work with communities in order to cooperate in the integrated development of the Couros area approaching experiences, interests and expectations of some its occupants, in this case, students, teachers and locals. The collaboration towards socialization among multiple creators acted as a design working tool in the social and cultural revitalization and recovery of the campus Urbis area of the University of Minho.

Keywords: *social innovation, design methodologies, local development, culture*

1. Design for social innovation: some reflections

In "Making Things Happen ..." Manzini (2014) addresses a number of cases from a radical innovation approach inspired by the co-design, which addresses the concept of "Design for Social Innovation". A collaborative design methodology based on designing for and with communities that breaks with the design methodologies both traditional and incremental, to set up new models where innovation is no longer limited to the "product" or "process" but is focused on populations, in their expectations and aspirations.

The methodologies of design emerge as an engine of social and cultural relationship between people and populations in the interaction with the territory and the needs of communities. The designer begins to participate in mixed teams from different disciplines and basic training, co-designing and co-producing activities, products and services driven by disruptive innovation (Christensen, C., Baumann, H., Ruggles, R. & Sadtler, T., 2006).

We are entering an age where design and designers find new approaches (Young, 2008) that pass through interventions with local communities in a bottom-up approach, where the work strategy is rooted in participatory methodologies that put the local population, designers and other creatives to work together in the affirmation of cultural values.

One example of the analysis of social innovation in Portugal is documented in a documentary co-produced by Parente, Martinho e Providência (2014), which depict, among other examples, the case of Terra Chã cooperative. In the last 20 years, the cooperative develops a work based on a collaborative approach that values local resources, the indigenous population and the community, and triggering, in a bottom-up perspective, a model of building and structuring local development projects oriented to the social, cultural and economic revitalization, focusing on intergenerational relationship and learning among peers.

This social intervention models bring a new dimension to the design, giving today to design education a social aspect, valuing people, products and local communities, until then non-existent. Bearing in mind our role of professionals, researchers and teachers in design, we can't remain oblivious to this humanizing and more effective movement of a discipline that keeping its technical nature integrates a new dimension of experimental projects "for and with communities". This approach imposes the need to rethink the design

methodology and the impact these may have on the education of our students in terms of their academic, professional and personal formation.

We approach in this article projects that seem to illustrate, at least partially, the new design methodologies, emphasizing the Em-Caixa project developed under the course unit Project Use and Identity, of the Product Design Degree at the Minho University. It is while teaching the course unit that we propose to reflect on the experience that has enrapture the team of teachers, creative students - design and theatre - and local people who annually dedicate a few weeks of hard work but also rewarding, to the co-production of a play with a scenography based in inspirations of local culture.

2. EmCaixa: a design learning-teaching project for Couros

2.1. The territory: Couros

Couros is a residential area, whilom the heart of the industrial city of Guimarães, bathed by a small stream, axis of tanneries job and textiles since the XIII century. It is characterized by a significant mesh of granite tanks (Figure 1), a site where craftsmen tanned and treated skins. This site was at the origin of the textile industry hub that in the late twentieth century would disappear.



Figure 1 Tanneries. tannery tanks. Workers. Decades of 1930/1940, Couros, Source: Muralha, Guimarães Association for the Defence of Heritage.

With the historic center classified as World Heritage by UNESCO in 2001 and the European Capital of Culture in 2012, Guimarães, redevelop the industrial heritage of Couros with the construction of a strategic project that combines the expertise of the University of Minho to local development through the autarchy. This political will was materialized in the creation of a creative hub of university extension, the campus Urbis, that integrates degree courses in the fields of theater and design, and is expected in the short term, the opening of a degree in visual arts.

In this city block, drawn at south by the small stream of Couros and at north by the Trovador Square (XIX – XX century), we find a community of families, some of whom were born, worked and lived here, building an immaterial capital patent in each door that opens. These are the stories of crafts, knowledge and families that are transmitted from generation to generation, filled with small materials and immaterial experiences, which symbolize memories and local cultural traits.

The proposal for an integrated plan in the context of courses Theatre Laboratory and Design Project - Use and Identities of respectively theatre and design courses, is born from the need to build teaching and learning methodologies from interdisciplinary and co-participation with the local community, allow rethink the function of these courses, as partners and actors in the construction of a new reality for Couros. The purpose is to integrate actors who often go "back to back", enabling from the socializing interaction

between the academic community and the local community, a sharing of values and practices for the development and joint construction of more humane future projects, whether of social, economic or cultural nature.

2.2. Sources of inspiration: "Arraial"

The design model for social innovation based on joint participation in the creation of shows, saw in Guimarães 2012 European Capital of Culture the systematization of a set of experiences. This is the case of the show "Arraial", which under the direction of Madalena Victorino and production of Circulando Company, worked with inhabitants of Donim, a local parish, dancers and musicians, a play alluding to the popular festival, developing a collaborative social integration and role playing.

In "Arraial," we found a show loaded of identity, either by affection or by the memories and traditions, which express individual and collective codes of the local population (Figure 2). Created based on symbols, the more genuine the population has, such as the "ex-votos", the work is based in the co-participation of the inhabitants of Donim and choreographers, dancers, musicians and technicians, for building new visual languages, and performativity movement grammars. As a result we saw born over nearly a year of work, the potential for human enhancement, as well as an intangible heritage that it enshrines in 2012 with the play, which is the synthesis of building a collective memory.



Figure 2 Arraial, final scene, Guimarães 2012.

The project involved a collaborative approach, where in 2011 and 2012, a working group consisting of mixed teams between local and professional populations of diverse creative areas in terms of basic training and consequent cultural codes and the actual reading, conceived, produced and played a show around the experiences of the inhabitants of Donim parish.

The model was based on a constant process of reflection of indigenous values of the local population to from various types of records from oral, memories, stories, beliefs and lifestyle, or materials such as various artifacts, build insertions that served as a base to building contexts and scenes that shape the various parts of the show.

This methodology would ultimately be decisive in the drawing of the EmCaixa exercise, that we will expose in the next part and that acknowledged in this example the need to work "with" and not "to" the local population in the EmCaixa project.

3. A model of teaching and learning design for social innovation: the experience of *EmCaixa*

3.1 The purpose of *EmCaixa*

From the social dynamics and cultural work with and for the local Couros community and inspired by the experiences described, as well as an earlier pilot project designated "Walking", the first project of articulation between the Theatre and Design courses. In the academic year 2014-2015 we began to design

an intervention that actively involved the people of this specific territory, with students and teachers in a new project, which was intended to be participatory and collaborative.

The project goal was to align work processes and the products of two scientific fields and teaching: theater and design, with local needs and expectations, articulating experiences, senses and learning in a joint production, which in the case of students and teachers, culminating in the work of the end of the second semester from both areas. For the local people we believe that it culminated in the sense of dignity and recognition of their life experiences.

The design project oriented, in the start-up phase, by the teachers and a creative team (directors and actress) provided a working script which included a link of the academic programs of each course in a challenge of involvement with the local community. The integration of the community began with the participation of the population off the Trovador Square who welcomed in their homes groups of students. Previously, the host population was contacted by teachers and placed alongside the project in order to decide to participate or not in the same. Students armed with observation grids, had the mission to explore the interior of the house, with the collection of material and immaterial sources, which testify to the local life. This interaction between students and local people involved five houses where five families lived, which formed the core of the participatory methodology.

The assembly work would lead to a final product - in the form of an integrated system - which materialized in: i) "objects" - physical products – by themselves nature of the design research, which materialized in scenarios, *i.e.*, in the production of the context for the different scenes; and ii) the act of theatrical representation of five pieces that characterize the site based on the research in the domestic context. The end result would be a play performed by students, with a production conceived by the team composed of students and the local population, which manifests the integration of the various interveners in building scenes that root identity factors of Couros.

The teaching-learning proposal is challenging, and we would say even daring, since we were working with first-year students, who saw in this work their first contact co-building with community, which, in turn, in such a short time of living together created expectations on the co-construction process. Because this was a final term project, the project had all the conditions to run well. The days are longer, allowing long working sessions, and the meteorology will benefit from the good temperature and sunny days.

The project, which was intended to be focused on the process of teaching and learning, ended up by taking a larger dimension, with the invitation to the team for participation in the "Gil Vicente" festival, a municipal strategic cluster of various theatre shows in town.

3.2 Methodology

The EmCaixa project emerges as an exercise that wants to work the interpersonal skills of design students who until then had only had the tangible product design experience. This exercise triggers a perspective of development and social awareness, working the capabilities of each student in connection with multidisciplinary teams involving different courses, as well as the local community.

The project is born from contact with the local community from the perspective of building with the community the spectacle. Around building a spectacle challenge, the project is five houses off the Trovador Square, five families, five performative possibilities, with the help of a mobile audience, create a narrative to gradually uncover the immaterial memory from Couros area.

Five mixed groups are created, leaving for the Trovador Square with an exploratory script.

It is an exercise of public space both for theatre and design students. The co-construction process of the play is developed in an intensive workshop model in which students, teachers and the creative team, are articulated for a week in a continuous process of work that is divided between Trovador Square (work object and place of presentation of the final work), Institute of Design of Guimarães (where prototypes are manufactured and props are assemble and disassemble) and theatre course facilities (place of rehearsals and meetings).

In design course facilities, is done the presentation of the entire team of teachers, students and creative team. It is created the first exercise from the analysis of a text (Figure 3), which aims to find points of contact and interpretation from the perspective of standardize codes of communication.



Figure 3 First working session between students of theatre courses and design in a text exploration activity..

Each group has to follow the challenge of making a visit to a house, where a local family is waiting for them, for a mutual sharing of experiences and collection of oral and written testimonies, visual records and where they must asked each family to provide an object of personal character with a emotional feature representative of the family or of some exceptional event.

This time of incursion by the 5 houses off the Trovador Square, became the time of constructing the sharing, a disruptive moment in the process of interaction between all these people, who despite cohabiting the same place, did not knew each other and therefore have not shared the testimony of several generations, life stories, situations laden with a local identity.

Each of the five houses hosted a group, shared stories, and fondly released a reference object of that home. There were many looks of the students who discovered between conversations with the natives, short stories, life stories that piece by piece told the past and present history of the Couros area (Figure 4).



Figura 4 Collection of material from one of the houses of the trovador square

A new working session takes place and students do the mapping and analysis of the records, which initiates the construction work of texts and scenography sketches for the construction of the identity of each of the five shows. This exercise starts either form part of the oral testimony, as a photograph or personal object.

The work dynamics goes through the work divided between design labs, theatre spaces and the Trovador Square that is constantly visited in order to reframe the exercises being drawn.

It is observed the day-by-day of the people who pass through here and the languages are improved, taking into account the population, the movement, the objects, from the character of scenic performances.

Behind the scenes of design labs, are conceived large-scale objects. According to the assumptions made in teamwork with students of theatre, the design students are involved in large-scale objects that demarcate the scenic space on the Trovador Square. Objects such as iron bathtubs, furniture, refrigerators that apparently would have been taken from each of the houses are worked in order to emphasize the theatrical performance (Figure 5)



Figura 5 Plenary session on construction of objects.

During a week between work mornings accompanied by tutors (teachers and creative team), afternoons and evenings testing and prototyping, the show is being created.

The enthusiasm and excitement of revisiting the place, the people and traditions of other times are the feelings that are lived every day in the process of co-construction.

At the same time, in a challenging way, the Academy of Music of the city also rehearses small scores as a liaison between the beginning of the procession of the show or articulation between each piece. The music academy intervenes between each of the scenes, following the repositioning of a mobile audience of where you see the show.

3.3 Product EmCaixa

As a result, we see the construction and initiation of five small shows, accompanied by a mobile audience that accompanied by the music played by the students of the city Academy of Music, readapts and positioned for each piece (Figure 6).



Figura 6 Time between shows with the movement of the audience

It was a show composed of several scenes where the stage was the Square in itself, with all the houses, locals, students and other people who were associating with this project and that finally led the experience of a day.

When the time comes, among curious, population, students and others who wanted to join the party, the show started, consecrating the sharing, that until then was more private, within each family and each

home. This is the time of completion of a memory that for years hid in each of the houses, and that moment goes out and turns into collective identity.

We found in the eyes of each one, whether it was Dona Maria, or students who together with her testimony built work, the construction of an immaterial value, an assertion cry and joint construction of a new identity for Couros and their populations that we believe to be potentiating social dignity, of human density and local development.

Witnessed the construction of new stories without walls or barriers, that in the construction of scenographic parts or creating a show, carry a mixture of appreciation of shared experiences in the reinterpretation of each element of this new collective composed of students, locals or support teams.

These were collective moments where the protagonists, inhabitants of each of the houses in their windows or balconies, students and the community in general, for a moment broke barriers.

During the construction of the show, including the construction of scenarios and shows we felt building a relationship between students and the local community where it was noticed the integration of all in building a collective whole.

During the show, we see the experiences of each inhabitant in particular, either in the way they could look the show from the window of their home, to the integration in the show, in support in the mobile audience drive, or in how grateful they were when collecting their personal objects for a mutual sharing of all this community and now richer also with theatre and design courses.

4. Conclusion

With the European Capital of Culture and the exercise drawn between the municipality and the university, we witnessed the creation of a dynamic that involves the rehabilitation of buildings in the cities and using them for building a creative hub of the university.

Creating a campus urbis of the University of Minho in the Couros area, with the Institute of Design and the Postgraduate Training Center where are installed respectively the design and theater courses as well as the Life Science Center are part of a strategy between the municipality and the university to the revitalization and development of the territory.

Cooperative work between the students and the people of Couros area, stimulates based on participatory methodologies, the approach to endogenous material and immaterial values, building an identity.

These two experiences, first "Andando" now EmCaixa, served as a starting point for understanding the importance of approximation of local communities in building a product with social value, believing that local development is not done only by way of economy but also from other disciplines that guided by the principles of sharing experiences and personal development are the foundations of a dignified life.

The construction model of this work around an intensive workshop with mixed teams, helps students developing interpersonal skills, planning and time management and conflict resolution, but also provides the construction of a personal interrelation with the population that manifests itself in self-recognition of personal and collective appreciation of it.

In turn, the students of design as well as theater need the establishment of publics whether for their shows or to their products and services, and contact with them in order to understand these same public, building dialogues to allow working their needs, in more tangible or intangible products.

The creation of participatory approaches involving local communities, students and professionals from different areas in a perspective of local development, is born as a counterpoint to a mass perspective of labor for the production of a standard product.

It seems therefore that the challenge can be guessed, passes much by the approach to the local population, from bottom-up working methods, which appreciates the particularity of each, students, residents of the Trovador Square, musicians and creative team, by incorporating a collective product.

Finally we believe in creating methodologies the work dynamics of inclusion as a way to promote more democratic and sustainable development.

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